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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: Scen setter for the Visit of CODEL Nelson/Lott to Turkey

(U) Sensitive but unclassified - please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: Your visit comes at a time of domestic political tumult and continued Turkish anxiety over Iraq and the PKK. Turkey stands at a crucial political crossroads as early parliamentary elections near. Officials here will be eager for an update on the ongoing congressional debate over funding for the war in Iraq and will press for U.S. action against PKK terrorist havens in northern Iraq. End Summary

Political Scene  
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12. (SBU) Your visit comes during a time of political uncertainty in Turkey and in the midst of campaigning for parliamentary elections to be held July 22. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has ruled as a one-party government for four-and-one-half years, enacting numerous economic and pro-democracy reforms. On April 24, AKP announced Deputy Prime Minister and FM Abdullah Gul as the party's candidate for President, a largely ceremonial office but one with significant veto and appointment powers currently held by the staunchly secular Ahmet Necdet Sezer. In Turkey, the president is elected by parliament. The first round of parliamentary voting on April 27 was marred by a procedural dispute and opposition parties petitioned the Constitutional Court to rule that the AKP did not have the necessary quorum to validate the results. Late on April 27, the TGS published a harshly-worded statement declaring its determination to defend the secular state against fundamentalism; this was perceived by many as a warning against a Gul presidency. The Constitutional Court annulled the first round of the presidential vote and interpreted quorum rules that effectively compelled early parliamentary elections.

13. (SBU) Both the AKP and opposition parties believe early elections are in their favor and offer the only way out of the constitutional deadlock. Meanwhile, Turks continue to debate the effect of the TGS' April 27 midnight statement and the degree to which it represents an undemocratic intervention into the political process. The European Union strongly condemned the military intervention as contrary to democratic development in Turkey. AKP and many liberal commentators claimed that TGS' move undermined reforms to strengthen democracy in Turkey. Many have also complained, however, that the AKP needlessly provoked the military by nominating Gul, whose wife wears the turban head covering common among Islamists here. Successive marches in various cities in recent weeks have drawn millions in a show of pro-secular solidarity. A widely carried slogan at these rallies have read, "neither sharia nor a military coup" - reflecting many Turks' opposition to over-reach by both the military and AKP.

14. (SBU) Our consistent message throughout this period of domestic political upheaval has emphasized strong support for Turkey's democratic institutions and constitutional mechanisms. We have made clear that there should be no extra-constitutional intervention in the democratic process. In your remarks here, it would be helpful to echo these sentiments and reiterate U.S. confidence in Turkey and in its democratic institutions.

## Incirlik Authorization Up for Renewal

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15. (SBU) The Turkish parliament's March 1, 2003 decision not to allow U.S. forces access to Iraq to open a northern front against Saddam from Turkish territory has given way to four years of crucial Turkish logistics support for Iraq operations from Turkey through the Incirlik Air Hub and by use of the land crossing at Habur Gate. U.S. authorization for the operations at Incirlik will expire June 22 and we have requested a one-year extension. It would be useful for you to express continued U.S. appreciation for Turkish support of this important logistics bridge.

## Iraq and Kirkuk

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16. (SBU) Iraq remains a major concern for Turkey and an ongoing source of friction in our bilateral relationship. Turkey is worried about increasing instability in Iraq, increasing Iranian influence in the region, and the potential for Iraq to splinter along sectarian and/or ethnic lines. They also worry about Iraqi Kurdish ambitions to expand their territory to include oil-rich Kirkuk. The prospect of a referendum later this year on the future status of Kirkuk exacerbates Turkish fears that a Kurdish annexation of the province will lead to massive inter-communal violence and, ultimately, the dissolution of the country. Transfer of control of Kirkuk to the Kurdish Regional Government also sparks fears of the creation of an independent Kurdish state. Because of the concentration of Turkey's minority Kurdish population in the country's southeastern quadrant, an independent Kurdistan in northern Iraq is perceived as an existential threat to Turkey.

## PKK - TGS Prepared to Take Action

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17. (SBU) The Kurdish terrorist organization PKK's safe-haven in northern Iraq is a continual irritant in U.S. -Turkey relations. Turkey has insisted since Operation Iraqi Freedom commenced in 2003 that the Iraqi government and/or the U.S. take steps to address this terrorist organization's freedom of movement in Iraq. PKK terrorist attacks against Turkey from strongholds in northern Iraq killed over 600 Turkish civilians and military in 2006 alone. A surge in PKK attacks last summer prompted the Turkish government to threaten a cross-border operation (CBO) into Iraq. To forestall this and to seek concrete actions to reduce PKK violence, the U.S. appointed Gen.(r) Joseph Ralston as Special Envoy for Countering PKK Terrorism in August 2006. The Turkish and Iraqi governments in turn named counterparts for Ralston: State Minister al-Waili for the GOI, and Gen. (r) Edip Baser for the GOT. Ralston has conducted numerous meetings with Iraqi and Turkish officials.

18. (SBU) However, Turkey's leaders remain frustrated by the perceived lack of concrete results. With continued clashes between the Turkish military and the PKK throughout the winter and spring, the government and military find themselves under increasing pressure to take unilateral action against PKK strongholds in northern Iraq. On April 12, Chief of Defense General Buyukanit publicly declared that the TGS considers a CBO necessary and useful, but deferred to a parliamentary vote to green-light such an operation and said TGS had not yet requested such approval.

## Armenian Genocide Resolution

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19. (SBU) Turks from across the political spectrum warn that the passage of an Armenian Genocide Resolution (AGR) will provoke a harshly negative reaction from the public - and become a major factor in the domestic political debate. They also argue that it would set back efforts to establish dialogue with Armenia, both on the historical issue and on the broader relationship.

WILSON